

GOLF  
WORLD

WESTMAN ISLAND, ICELAND

# TOP 100

**X FACTOR COURSES**  
CONTINENTAL  
EUROPE

THE MOST AUTHORITATIVE  
RANKINGS IN THE GAME

## EUROPE'S MOST WANTED

Nuance and subtlety are out. Jaw-dropping settings, thrilling holes, tournament pedigree and flawless greens are in!

# WELCOME



Monte Rei

Let's get straight to the crux of this ranking; what is an 'X Factor Top 100'? Without explanation, it might sound disconcertingly vague. With explanation, I think it makes sense – and the criteria and desirable qualities are probably easier to digest than in our standard Top 100s.

In fact, simply listing the categories used to assess the courses tells you all you need to know about this ranking. They could barely be any less abstract, and were: Setting; Dramatic Holes; Tournament Pedigree; Conditioning.

There is nothing subtle about this Top 100 and a lot less emphasis on nuance and charm in the courses in it. We sought thrilling, explosive courses with the ability to make your jaw drop and inspire awe.

Even more than usual – and this is definitely a key part in every Top 100 we publish – there was a sense of 'where would you be excited to play tomorrow?' Where would make you think 'wow' after the first few holes? Where would make you send an excited message to your mates as you had a break after nine holes? What are you mostly likely to have as your screensaver?

We place significant emphasis on the subtlety of design in our other rankings, but not here. We just wanted to identify the courses that would blow your mind, not quietly and subconsciously charm you.

I think the courses that follow in the next

pages do that in the four various ways. Unrepentant design connoisseurs might want to scoff at the positions of some courses they don't rate, but for the rest – who make up the majority of golfers – this will be the ultimate bucket list to tick off.

For one very good reason, I found it the easiest Top 100 I've ever compiled; I knew exactly *who* I was doing it for. People say to me that it must be hard to judge a heathland against a links and I know what they mean by that, but I don't find it especially difficult to assess courses of different character.

What I *do* find difficult is knowing who I am producing Top 100s for. Obviously, not all golfers who buy the magazine and visit the website are the same! Some crave clever design, others relish aesthetic value, many just want good greens.

As a result, what I think we do is, rightly or wrongly, promote the best of the different kinds of courses the different 'types' of golfers want. Our GB&I Top 100 is definitely a mix of strategic architecture, breathtaking locations and immaculate conditioning. The largest emphasis in the weighting of the marks is in the first category – and I think it's correct that that's the case – but courses also get in principally because of their setting or maintenance.

The common theme across all our lists these days is fun. Yes, there are plenty of stringent courses in the GB&I list (fewer

than previously, though), but they generally do less well than they have in previous lists.

In this X Factor ranking, I knew exactly the sort of golfer I was doing this list for. It's probably not exactly me, although I've loved playing 76 of this 100 and can't wait to get to the missing 24, but I have lots of friends and colleagues for whom this ranking hits the nail squarely on the head.

I had them in mind as I pondered many, many of the positions. 'Where would *they* play and be most likely to send me a message saying, 'That was amazing, LOVED it?'' That was my guiding principle.

I finessed the list for weeks on end in my typically agonised manner, but there was definitely an element of gut instinct being correct in this one and the very first 1-100 list bore a remarkable resemblance to the final version you're about to read.

I hope you find the 100 interesting and inspiring and I'd be particularly pleased to hear not just your views on what's made it in, but also on whether the emphasis in this list is more appropriate to you and your friends and family than in our standard continental list? I think there is definitely room for both but I'd be very glad to hear from you on the subject, because helping you make educated choices about where to play is the sole reason we do these lists.

**Chris Bertram, Top 100 Editor**

**'PUT IT ON YOUR BUCKET LIST.  
I'M CERTAIN IT WON'T DISAPPOINT'**



# 1 LOFOTEN LINKS

 GIMSØYSAND,  
NORWAY

X Factor keys Setting | Drama

No tournaments and never likely to be any. Conditioning is remarkably good, given the location within the Arctic Circle and the relatively meagre resources of the greenkeeper. But if I said to you that Lofoten is one of the clearest No.1s of the past two years, you'll get an idea of how strong its setting and drama are.

Quite simply, it is the most beautiful, jaw-dropping, inspirational and natural setting I've ever played golf in. I've been to Turnberry, to Nefyn, to Cape Kidnappers, to Old Head, to Yas Links,

to Bro Hof, to Lemuria and to Thracian Cliffs. All remarkable in their own way, and some are very high in this list. But none touches Lofoten.

I'm not sure I am sufficiently skilled to write any better than what I wrote after my visit in 2017, so here it is again. "It is archetypal seaside beauty, with a rugged strand, as if Glencoe has been transported to the coast. There are towering mountains in the foreground and snow-capped peaks on the horizon beyond, their voluminous nature exaggerated by being surrounded

by gently undulating but remarkably flat linksland. The ripples of the Norwegian Sea stretch uninhibited as far as the eye can see – which is towards the North Pole – and its waves lightly kiss the white-sand shoreline. Yet for all those handsome elements, it is the hundreds of rocks and boulders on the beach, lining fairways and cuddling greens that dominate the eye."

The image on this page will likely give you a better idea of what to expect. The pictures don't lie.

Adding to the X Factor is the fact it is

officially in the Arctic Circle. Pretty cool to be playing golf there, and it means while there is no sunrise for a month from early December, from a month across May and June the sun doesn't set at all and it is light all night until the start of August.

Even getting there has X Factor, especially if you fly to Harstad/Narvik Airport on the mainland and then make a spectacular three-hour drive through Insta-worthy scenery. Or you can fly in to the tiny airport of Svolvær in a propeller plane from Bodo, which you reach from Oslo,

then twist and turn along roads at the foot of the mountains that hug the fjords.

The holes themselves at Lofoten – designed by Sweden-based Englishman Jeremy Turner – vary between the most epic you've ever played to simply stunning to just very good. It is not all edge-of-the-seat stuff in a golf sense, but I'd say two-thirds of the course instantly ticks the box marked Drama. And even the more modest golf holes have some sort of bewilderingly good backdrop. In short, it is a trip and an experience that will live with you forever.

# 2

## VALDERRAMA

 SOTOGRANDE, SPAIN

**X Factor keys** Conditioning | Tournaments

The host of the 1997 Ryder Cup and numerous high-profile European Tour events has a feeling of 'walking in the footsteps of icons' like no other on the continent. Even Tiger Woods played in that memorable Ryder Cup, in an era that it doesn't really feel he was part of.

The Robert Trent Jones Snr course is also manicured to the nth degree; tees are like greens on other courses. In fact, the fairways are passable impressions of putting surfaces.

It boasts a handful of dramatic holes, not least the controversial water-dominated 17th. But as is the case so often in this ranking, the feeling of 'Oh, I'd love to have a go there' is so, so strong.



# 3

## THRACIAN CLIFFS

 CAPE KALIAKRA, BULGARIA

**X Factor keys** Setting | Drama | Tournaments

Just a sensational canvas for a golf course. Thracian is simply breathtaking. The pictures of it make you want to play there, but they almost don't do it justice. This is cliff-edge golf on a scale that only Old Head and our No.4 entry can match in Europe.

It would be literally impossible not to build dramatic holes on this site. Add in some tournament pedigree after the Matchplay was there a decade ago for a quite awe-inspiring result.



#### 4 BRAUTARHOLT

REYKJAVIK, ICELAND

X Factor keys Setting | Drama

I mean just look at it (right). Laid out on clifftops north of Iceland's capital, this 12-hole course is jaw-droppingly beautiful, right from the first hole, a par 5 played to an elevated green on a ledge cut into the cliff. When you're not playing alongside the cliffs or towards the sea, you're firing towards epic mountains in the other direction. It requires just 12 holes to get it into our top five – and it could easily have been a place or two higher. Unquestionably bucket-list stuff – and just watch for it to drive a big movement towards Icelandic golf breaks very soon.

#### 5 LEGOLF NATIONAL (ALBATROS)

PARIS, FRANCE

X Factor keys Tournaments | Drama

The last European Ryder Cup host and the stage for many European Tour events down the decades. There is water, water everywhere.

An unashamedly brash, in-your-face design by Robert von Hagge and Rick Baril, who moved earth by the ton to turn a flat field into a thrill-a-minute, nerve-shredding hit and giggle (at your ball's watery grave).

#### 6 BRO HOF SLOTT (STADIUM)

STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN

X Factor keys Setting | Drama | Tournaments

Almost matches Golf National for water-based drama. Certainly the climax to Bro Hof's No.1 course leaves nothing in the locker; you are basically worrying about H2O over all of your last dozen long-game shots. It's hosted the Tour and is in mint condition; arguably the most rounded X Factor course in Europe.

#### 7 CRANS-SUR-SIERRE

CRANS-MONTANA, SWITZERLAND

X Factor keys Setting | Drama

'Spectacular' and 'breathtaking' don't have to mean coastal. Crans might be modest at times in terms of the actual holes, but when you've got these backdrops, you're agonising a bit less on the architectural nuance. Pure, pure beauty.

#### 8 WESTMAN ISLAND

WESTMAN ISLAND, ICELAND

X Factor keys Setting

A second Icelandic entry in the top 10 and, if anything, this is a harsh position. It really is *that* scenic. Set down at the foot of a towering mountain and with the sea always visible, you can't go to Iceland (and this Top 100 may tempt you) and not get the 30-minute ferry to this island.



#### 'BRAUTARHOLT BLEW MY MIND'

Architect Tim Lobb on the beauty of this breathtaking Icelandic course

We chose Iceland as the venue for our annual European Institute of Golf Course Architects conference because we were focusing on how intelligent course design and construction can help to reduce our impact on climate change in our sector.

Iceland is one of the most progressive nations on the planet in regards to climate change and achieving net zero, and we learnt a lot from their initiatives and courses.

The courses we played in the

Presidents Cup, Brautarholt and Keilir, were exceptional examples of environmentally aware golf courses sitting comfortably and lightly in their raw and immense landscapes.

Both were wonderful, but there are just not many courses with the drama and sense of scale as Brautarholt. There are parts of golf courses with elements of it around the world, but not many where it's on that kind of scale.

As an entire course, it is hard to compare it. Parts of it remind you of Cypress Point – particularly the coastal holes. It is not a dune site, so it is difficult to compare it to many of the

famous coastal courses.

I thought the routing Edwin Roald did for the course is incredible. It uses the coastal features very well, but also the transitions between holes add to the drama of the experience. For example, the walk from the 1st green to the 2nd tee has a huge sense of arrival and reveal of the magnificent coastline.

It does sometimes happen that when the setting is breathtaking, the architecture becomes quiet and the majesty of the location just washes over the golfer. Or the hunger to get on the coast results in narrow or poorly designed holes. This is not the case at Brautarholt.

It is tough to choose a favourite hole there, but I would probably have to say the 2nd. Edwin had said to us that he laid it out with the thought of Woking's 4th in the back of his mind, wanting to create a central hazard and use the coastline on the right as the out of bounds, so to speak. The setting and strategy is perfect, it blew my mind.

They are extending the course and I think the land is big enough for 18 holes. I hope they keep the 12 holes as a playing option though, as it's pretty perfect for a game of golf. We should always design and build the correct number of holes for the land.



# 9 COSTA NAVARINO (BAY)

🇬🇷 KALAMATA, GREECE  
X Factor keys Setting

Might be a surprise to see this name so high, not least because it is generally regarded as the No.2 course at its own resort. But this Robert Trent Jones Jnr design pretty much never loses sight of Navarino Bay, and frequently plays towards it or alongside it. There is an element of some holes being back and forward and a little unimaginative in a golf sense, but if you want aesthetic appeal, the Bay delivers handsomely. We were wowed the first time we played it, but only appreciated quite how good it was on the second round – there simply aren't many courses that deliver as consistently a picture-perfect experience.

## ONE FOR NEXT TIME

OKOL Lake Park in Bulgaria has been laid out by Robin Hiseman (European Golf Design) to take advantage of the natural features of the site, including providing views of Iskar Lake. Excited to check it out when it opens.

## 10 MONTE REI

🇵🇹 TAVIRA, PORTUGAL

X Factor keys Conditioning | Drama

This Jack Nicklaus design rivals Valderrama in the 'not a blade out of place' category. There is also an 'experience' factor at Monte Rei, which does service and special like few others. There are plenty of exciting moments in the holes themselves, but just be sure to bring your best ball-striking.

## 11 PRAIA D'EL REY

🇵🇹 OBIDOS, PORTUGAL

X Factor keys Setting | Drama

The front nine, partly between pines, is a nice, if slow-burning, start and lacks X Factor on this level. Then the back nine absolutely douses you in it. From the moment you fire down towards the Atlantic from the elevated 10th tee, there is setting and drama on every hole.

## 12 SPERONE

🇫🇷 CORSICA, FRANCE

X Factor keys Setting | Drama

Another Trent Jones Snr design that puts a huge green tick in the Setting box. Several holes are perilously set down on the edge of cliffs with the glistening Med below.

## 13 WEST CLIFFS

🇵🇹 OBIDOS, PORTUGAL

X Factor keys Setting | Drama

Epic is the word for West Cliffs. Set down on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean, it is exhilarating and challenging in equal measure. Cynthia Dye made it a proper



Oitavos Dunes, Portugal

test of your game, but the rewards are significant.

## 14 MORFONTAINE (GRAND PARCOURS)

🇫🇷 PARIS, FRANCE

X Factor keys Drama | Conditioning

Continental Europe's categorical No.1 (in our opinion). As good as pretty much any Surrey heathland, this Tom Simpson classic oozes class, but also quiet drama in its golf challenge. A special place and experience.

## 15 VIDAUBAN

🇫🇷 NICE, FRANCE

X Factor keys Conditioning | Drama

We don't rank uber-private Vidauban in our Continental list as we've only had a couple of panellists there. But this ranking is less stuffy and we know how good it is. The only course Trent Jones Snr and Jnr worked together on. The Lions rugby team

has more players than it has members so you won't be surprised to hear it's in decent nick. X Factor meets Wish List.

## 16 OITAVOS DUNES

🇵🇹 LISBON, PORTUGAL

X Factor keys Setting | Drama | Tournaments

Atlantic views and Atlantic breezes on this gorgeous seaside experience near Cascais. A stunning site that could possibly have been maximised further (hard not to dream about what Doak or Hanse would have done), it's a salty-aired adventure over undulating sandy terrain. A tour host, too.

## 17 UTRECHT DE PAN

🇳🇱 UTRECHT, NETHERLANDS

X Factor keys Drama | Tournaments

The continent's No.2 in our main ranking is this Harry Colt heathland jewel. Pines and heather heaven. Has hosted the Tour, most recently in 1982... and Sam Snead played! A different time, a better time.



Sperone, France

GOLF  
WORLD  
TOP  
100

# 'My X Factor essentials'

By Sky Sports' voice of golf, Ewen Murray



The X Factor on a golf day out is something that's talked about in clubhouses throughout the world and there are various opinions on what is required to give a visit that extra special element.

Some focus 100 percent on the golf course, whereas others, myself included, tend to look at the whole experience, from arrival to departure.

It also surely depends on what type of golf you prefer the most: links, parkland or heathland. I happen to enjoy all three and some that stand out in my memory are fairly exclusive clubs that not all will have the opportunity to enjoy.

Two are in France. **Morfontaine** on the outskirts of Paris and, in the Loire Valley, **Les Bordes**. One old, one relatively new.

Morfontaine was a trip back in time. Set in superb heathland, its rural and gently rolling topography is unrivalled. Heather, birch, pines, rocks and fescue grasses gave me the impression God presented this land to golfers. I did not want the round to end and each hole enjoyed individuality.

Les Bordes is more parkland in nature and was designed by the excellent Robert von Hagge at the request of Baron Bich. Around 30 years old, playing this course is a unique experience. About 1,000 yards longer than Morfontaine, it has a similar atmosphere.

The golf course is all you see when playing. There is an abundance of carp-laden lakes, all of which come into play whether it be off the tee or around the green.

There are lodges close to the rustic clubhouse where you can stay, but once you drive through the gates it's really just you and the course. A 'get away from it all' experience, a brilliant design and with French cooking and some of the finest crushed grapes in the world, this is X Factor at its very best.

However, take plenty of balls. No matter what tees you play off, you'll find many of whatever brand you choose will end up resting alongside the carp!

**Ballyliffin** is another that on first sight will take your breath away. It's on the Wild Atlantic Way, which boasts some of the country's finest vistas. And like everywhere in Ireland, it offers hospitality only they can; to me, that's a big part of enjoying a day out when experiencing different courses.

As a Scot, it may come as no surprise to learn I'm a links lover. I adore the rolling fairways, the uncertainty, the ever-changing weather and skylines, the acceptance of good



**'THE AMBIANCE MEANS AS MUCH TO ME AS THE COURSE. THE WHOLE EXPERIENCE, FROM ARRIVAL TO DEPARTURE, IS CRUCIAL'**

shots, with a bit of luck included.

I really wish the ball had been better controlled over the last 30 years and that frying pan-headed drivers hadn't got past the design stage. It renders many courses obsolete. I don't mean they're not playable or you don't enjoy them - it's just you're not playing them the way they were intended.

In Scotland, I had many wonderful days as a youngster playing some outstanding courses. **Dunbar, Elie, North Berwick, Montrose, Edzell, Monifieth, Royal Dornoch**, and **Gullane** No.1 was always a tough test. I could go on and on. These courses are generally shy of 7,000 yards. With today's increase in driving distance, with technology's 'help', the bunkers are in the wrong places and there are too many short-iron second shots, so the real challenge of these and so many wonderful courses within our shores has diminished a little.

My heathland favourites in Britain would be **Sunningdale** and **Walton Heath** - all four courses there, Old and New. We are blessed to have these, along with **Liphook, New Zealand** and **Swinley Forest**.

A day at Sunningdale is highlighted by the glorious layout (pictured), but we mustn't forget the sausage sandwich hut at the 10th hole of their two courses. A must visit.

Walton Heath, coming up to 120 years old,

is a day to treasure. Its enchanting clubhouse is a welcome break between rounds over these two Herbert Fowler-designed courses.

Liphook boasts arguably the finest-conditioned greens in England and with changes afoot ahead of their centenary, it will continue to be a favourite of many who'll make the pilgrimage there in the years ahead.

Stateside, I'm not a great fan of **Pebble Beach**. It's a beautiful place, but it comes a long way behind its neighbour, **Cypress Point**. Again, Cypress is most exclusive, but if you ever get the chance to play there, drop everything and give yourself a treat.

Much is talked about the par-3 16th, and rightly so. Standing on that tee, watching the sea otters is hypnotising, but the rest of the course also offers charm and classic design.

I'm sure the people of this club would like a stronger finishing hole, but the other 17 holes more than makes up for that. I played there with Howard Clark when we were covering the McDowell US Open at Pebble in 2010. The memories are still vivid. The best I've seen in America, although I haven't played **Pine Valley**.

Another course that has that special feel is **Winged Foot**, just north of New York. It's everything you'd want for in that once-in-a-lifetime round.

The day you'll remember forever will include more than just the golf course. The welcome is the first impression that will linger long in the memory. To feel welcomed throughout the day is important. The ambiance means as much as the course, because you have carefully chosen the venue. Lunch between rounds or breakfast on arrival should be looked forward to and, on leaving, one should take some fine images away with you.

While I'm not a fan of the changes in equipment, I am a huge admirer of the advances in agronomy. A course in top-class condition is a must and the standard of greenkeeping today is higher than ever. There is nothing worse than planning the venue, having high expectations and then seeing your hopes dashed by a poorly presented course. Thankfully, they are now few and far between.

A day as a visitor to a course is a special experience and a combination of so many aspects give you the X Factor you are always looking for. Those are just a few of mine.

■ Ewen Murray was brought up in Edinburgh and played on the European Tour before becoming Sky Sports' main golf commentator in the early '90s.



Alcanada, Spain



Anfi Tauro, Spain



Finca Cortesin, Spain

## 18 PARNU BAY

PARNU, ESTONIA

X Factor keys Drama | Setting

A Lassi Pekka Tilander design that probes your game with dramatic holes... then unleashes exhilarating coastal holes on you to finish. So good.

## 19 ALCANADA

MAJORCA, SPAIN

X Factor keys Setting

Set down around the Bay of Alcudia, this Trent Jones Jnr course is the perfect place for a summer's evening round. Aesthetically exquisite.

## 20 FINCA CORTESIN

CASARES, SPAIN

X Factor keys Conditioning | Tournaments

Relaid its greens a few years ago and they are insanely good. 'Slick' and 'true' barely do them justice. Has hosted the Volvo Matchplay and is the next Solheim Cup venue. A definite 'experience' factor here, too.

## 21 ANFI TAURO

GRAN CANARIA, SPAIN

X Factor keys Drama | Setting

This Robert von Hagge course on Gran Canaria is, at times, very difficult, but you aren't counting up shots or balls lost because you're too busy taking pictures. A desert scene of rocks and ledges that climbs to offer staggering sea views.

## 22 VERDURA (WEST)

SICILY, ITALY

X Factor keys Setting | Tournaments

Kyle Phillips has been back to remodel both courses here and the West has ended up with marginally the better of the coastal holes. It's also, for the most part, the course used here for European Tour events.

## 23 ROYAL BLEĐ

BLEĐ, SLOVENIA

X Factor keys Drama | Setting | Conditioning

Echoes of Crans-sur-Sierre, but a better actual golf course. Swan Designs revamped it after it was taken over by the Solak family and it's in wonderful nick. The only thing more beautiful is the lake town of Bled itself.

## 24 VISBY

GOTLAND, SWEDEN

X Factor keys Setting | Drama

Island course with some pedigree that was redesigned by Pierre Fulke. It touches great aesthetic heights on more holes than it doesn't.

## 25 MARCO SIMONE

ROME, ITALY

X Factor keys Drama | Setting | Tournaments

Will be higher after it's hosted the Ryder Cup next year, but even before the matches there is definitely a 'would like to' factor to Marco Simone. Completely redesigned

by Dave Sampson, of EGD, the finish in particular is terrific.

## 26 KYTAJA (SOUTH EAST)

HYVINKAA, FINLAND

X Factor keys Drama | Setting

Never anything less than gorgeous, this Tom McBroom course travels through all the cliched Finnish scenes and ends with some Insta-perfect lakeside holes.

## 27 VERDURA (EAST)

SICILY, ITALY

X Factor keys Drama | Setting | Tournaments

Has a bit of everything. And the East is now Italy's No.1. Playable, charming and aesthetically pleasing.

## 28 TROIA

LISBON, PORTUGAL

X Factor keys Drama | Setting

A Trent Jones Snr seaside course that does a really good job of making the most of the coast and an even better job of challenging you! Tour host going back to the 1980s, when Sam Torrance won here.

## 29 PEDRENA

PEDRENA, SPAIN

X Factor keys Tournaments | Setting

'Tournaments' (in the X Factor key) is misleading. It has hosted nothing you'd know of. But it was the course, as a boy and a man, of someone who won plenty

of them. Seve's home club has a magic to it, and it's also a Harry Colt original with a gorgeous seaside location. We think its pilgrimage factor makes it top-30 worthy.

## 30 LA RESERVA CLUB

SOTOGRANDE, SPAIN

X Factor keys Conditioning | Setting  
Tournaments | Drama

The first to tick all four boxes in our countdown. La Reserva is at least a 7/10 in all and in the case of Conditioning, it's more like a 9.5. Mediterranean views from its elevated fairways and some terrific holes.

## 31 ABAMA

TENERIFE, SPAIN

X Factor keys Setting | Drama

Epic greens on this Dave Thomas design; not only do they have bags of movement, they are also super slick. Augusta-esque, and the Atlantic backdrop from its elevated fairways is not the worst.

## 32 SAN LORENZO

FARO, PORTUGAL

X Factor keys Setting | Drama

For a few holes in the middle of the front nine, San Lorenzo doesn't just ooze X Factor, it's been marinated overnight in it. The 5th green to the 8th tee are an epic seaside stretch and a bit more of that and it'd be 20 places higher. There's still drama elsewhere, mind.



Quinta da Ria, Portugal

## 33 LA HACIENDA ALCAIDESA (LINKS)

SOTOGRANDE, SPAIN

X Factor keys Setting | Drama

Recently rebranded and renovated, the Links course takes the breath away with its Med-side holes. This Top 100 was designed for its high-octane scenes.

## 34 QUINTA DA RIA

TAVIRA, PORTUGAL

X Factor keys Drama | Setting

Another course built for X Factor. Da Ria won't ever win any awards for intricate design, but its seaside setting packs a knockout punch. Just a gorgeous place to play the game.

### 35 KEILIR

🇮🇸 REYKJAVIK, ICELAND

X Factor keys Drama | Setting

Twin it with Brautarholt for the ultimate X Factor day. Iceland has two top-25 entries; it is very much on the golf map. Keilir's front nine winds between lava rocks next to the sea and the back round plays around a bay. Insta heaven.

### 36 EL SALER

🇪🇸 VALENCIA, SPAIN

X Factor keys Drama | Setting

A bit like San Lorenzo, its highs are very high – which, in El Saler's case, are mainly the second half of the front nine – but not quite high enough to be top 30. The rest is a very good Javier Arana design.

### 37 PENHA LONGA (ATLANTICO)

🇵🇹 LISBON, PORTUGAL

X Factor keys Drama | Tournaments

Kyle Phillips made a brilliant job of routing the Atlantico over dramatically undulating land. And because he got it so right, the elevated tee shots are heart-thumpingly thrilling and the uphill holes are intriguing rather than a toil. Hosted lots of tour events.

### 38 ADAMSTAL

🇦🇹 RAMSAU, AUSTRIA

X Factor keys Drama | Setting

Irishman Jeff Howes made a superb job of laying out Adamstal in a wondrous Alpine setting. Only the 1st is really flat, after that you are traversing mountainous land and tackling exciting holes.

### 39 PALHEIRO

🇵🇹 MADEIRA, PORTUGAL

X Factor keys Drama | Setting

From its seriously lofty fairways and holes among splendid Augusta-like foliage, the views over Madeira's capital, Funchal, fully justifies Palheiro this notable position.



Santo da Serra, Madeira



Keilir, Iceland

### 40 CASTELFALFI

🇮🇹 SIENA, ITALY

X Factor keys Drama | Setting

Awesome setting among Tuscan hills for a course that hits the heights for Instagram, if not quite for design purists. Loads of wow factor, though.

### 41 SANTO DA SERRA

🇵🇹 MADEIRA, PORTUGAL

X Factor keys Drama | Setting | Tournaments

Madeira courses are like buses in this list... Perched high, overlooking Funchal and with nerve-tingling carries over ravines, it is not short on excitement – then add in the kudos of multiple European Tour events.

### 42 VIK

🇮🇸 VIK, ICELAND

X Factor keys Setting

Set yards from the iconic black-sand beaches in the south of the country, a towering mountain watches every shot. Screensaver-esque scenery.

### 43 LE TOUQUET (LA MER)

🇫🇷 LE TOUQUET, FRANCE

X Factor keys Setting | Drama

A course that does well in our standard continental ranking but, helped by recent tree and bush clearance, has enough explosive scenes and dramatic holes to make a prominent appearance here.

Castelfalfi, Italy





Salobre, Spain



Penati, Slovakia

#### 44 PGA NATIONAL TURKEY (SULTAN)

**BELEK, TURKEY**  
X Factor keys Drama | Tournaments | Conditioning  
The first course that lured Tiger to Turkey was a regular Tour stop for a while and its water-lined fairways are a thrillseeker's paradise. In truly incredible condition.

#### 45 LES BORDES (OLD)

**ORLEANS, FRANCE**  
X Factor keys Conditioning | Drama  
Uber-tough Robert von Hagge design at this exclusive club that has two entries. Awesome maintenance and plenty of thrills on the water-dominated holes. Just don't expect to play to your handicap!

#### 46 QUINTA DO LAGO (SOUTH)

**FARO, PORTUGAL**  
X Factor keys Tournaments | Setting  
It's hosted as many European Tour events as almost anywhere else, going back to the days when it was the B & C loops rather than the South. Champions include Colin Montgomerie. Takes you close to the water for some aesthetic X Factor.

#### 47 PGA CATALUNYA (STADIUM)

**GIRONA, SPAIN**  
X Factor keys Tournaments | Drama | Conditioning  
Host of the European Tour on numerous occasions and we can't help but feel one day it will land the one it really wants, the Ryder Cup. It would be a super venue, with many memorable holes and seriously good maintenance.

#### 48 LES BORDES (NEW)

**ORLEANS, FRANCE**  
X Factor keys Drama | Conditioning  
Gil Hanse's new offering at this exclusive club has echoes of English heathlands and is in wonderful condition.

#### 49 SALOBRE (NEW)

**GRAN CANARIA, SPAIN**  
X Factor keys Setting | Drama  
A thrill-a-minute course on Gran Canaria that is at times a bit bonkers, but never anything less than engaging. Arizona-like landscape is a superb setting.

#### 50 SIGLO

**SIGLUFJORDUR, ICELAND**  
X Factor keys Setting  
On the edge of the pretty seaside town where

TV series *Trapped* was filmed, Siglo is another Icelandic entry that takes the breath away. Surrounded on all sides by mountains, it could easily have been 20 places higher.

#### 51 ESTELA

**PORTO, PORTUGAL**  
X Factor keys Drama | Setting  
Historic seaside course north of Porto that offers fast-running fairways, salty breezes and a 'glad to be a golfer' feeling. Hosted the Tour, when Steven Richardson won.

#### 52 SON GUAL

**MAJORCA, SPAIN**  
X Factor keys Conditioning | Drama  
This Majorcan course is bettered by few in terms of conditioning. Close to Valderrama levels, despite hosting so many more golfers. Simply exceptional – and with some cracking holes, too.

#### 53 TERRE BLANCHE (CHATEAU)

**NICE, FRANCE**  
X Factor keys Conditioning | Setting  
Our No.1 Continental resort is home to a delightful course in terrific condition. Its setting is Provençal heaven, with the trees, bushes and shrubs of the region combining to provide a perfumed idyll as you play.

#### 54 ROYAL OSTEND

**OSTEND, BELGIUM**  
X Factor keys Drama | Setting  
Another to fall into the 'genuine links' category (trust us, there are *not* many on the continent), and here you get one of the most memorable and heart-stopping holes on the continent, the downhill short 7th.

#### 55 BUDERSAND

**BUDERSAND, GERMANY**  
X Factor keys Drama | Setting  
Remoteness of this proper links (which gains it appeal) by Rolf-Stephan Hansen adds to its allure. Built on an old military practice facility, it's eerily good as it plays between dunes and almost 100 pot bunkers.

#### 56 GRANVILLE

**GRANVILLE, FRANCE**  
X Factor keys Drama | Setting  
This grand old links has an X Factor setting and the X Factor from being one of the very few proper links on the continent. We think it is more 'British links' than its Dutch counterparts.

#### 57 NOORDWIJKSE

**NOORDWIJK, NETHERLANDS**  
X Factor keys Drama | Setting  
The opening seaside stretch is terrific, as are the closing holes on similar linksland. No.29 in our Continental Top 100, it could be really, *really* good with a thorough renovation. Links golf on a grand scale.

#### 58 BLACK SEA RAMA

**BALCHIK, BULGARIA**  
X Factor keys Drama | Setting  
Arguably a better course technically than Thracian Cliffs and has more than a dash of its wow factor, with lovely scenes on the back nine and water to avoid on the front.

#### 59 MORFONTAINE (VALLIERE)

**PARIS, FRANCE**  
X Factor keys Drama  
Just nine holes, but stay with us. Those nine are more explosive than the contents of the A-Team van's boot. Holes of a mesmeric nature and greens that are as bewildering as they are brilliant.

#### 60 CARYA

**BELEK, TURKEY**  
X Factor keys Drama | Tournament  
Turkey's top course earns this spot for its engaging holes and regular staging of the European Tour. A stirring journey among pines and between white-sand bunkers.

#### 61 FALSTERBO

**FALSTERBO, SWEDEN**  
X Factor keys Drama | Setting  
Sweden's No.1 takes a little while to get really going, but eventually moves into proper links land, including some exhilarating seaside holes.

#### 62 RAEVO

**MOSCOW, RUSSIA**  
X Factor keys Conditioning | Drama  
A big-boned Jack Nicklaus design on the outskirts of Moscow whose lush fairways and quick greens are routinely in immaculate condition.

#### 63 BARSEBACK (MASTERS)

**MALMO, SWEDEN**  
X Factor keys Tournaments | Setting  
Solheim Cup and European Tour venue that is a hybrid of seaside and woodland holes, with the former contributing to its Setting status.

#### 64 DOM PEDRO VILAMOURA (OLD)

**VILAMOURA, PORTUGAL**  
X Factor keys Tournaments | Setting  
The Grand Old Lady of the Algarve doesn't have a seaside setting, but its tranquility and pure golf scene – not many houses here alongside the fairways – are a delight. Class is permanent.

#### 65 PENATI (NICKLAUS)

**BRATISLAVA, SLOVAKIA**  
X Factor keys Drama | Setting  
We rank its sister course – the Heritage – in our main Continental list and have no doubt it's a better all-round course, but this Jack Nicklaus design – complete with par 6 – has the X Factor as it cuts through mature pines.

#### 66 FONTAINEBLEAU

**PARIS, FRANCE**  
X Factor keys Drama  
The continent's No.3 in our main list, this is a classy heathland steeped in tradition and quality. Routed brilliantly through an ancient forest by Tom Simpson.

#### 67 VALE DO LOBO (OCEAN)

**VILAMOURA, PORTUGAL**  
X Factor keys Setting  
The X Factor is relatively brief here, but the dial is turned up to capacity when the Ocean lives up to its name and gets close to Med. Just a few more holes like those and it's top 30.

#### 68 DOMAINE IMPERIAL

**GENEVA, SWITZERLAND**  
X Factor keys Drama | Setting  
Pete Dye's only European design enjoys a great location right on the lakeshore with a castle as a clubhouse. The place Michael Schumacher chose as his home.

#### 69 ULLNA

**STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN**  
X Factor keys Setting | Drama  
A reworked parkland, with several holes by the water that gives it drama and aesthetic value. In our main Continental ranking now.

#### 70 ROYAL LAS PALMAS

**GRAN CANARIA, SPAIN**  
X Factor keys Drama | Setting  
This historic course is perched on the edge

of a volcano – how much more dramatic do you want? Panoramic views beyond its fairways.

#### 71 PEVERO

**SARDINIA, ITALY**  
X Factor keys Drama | Setting  
The view from the 15th tee gets Pevero in alone. A Robert Trent Jones Snr design on the well-heeled Costa Smeralda with plenty of wow factor.

#### 72 DIAMOND

**ATZENBRUGG, AUSTRIA**  
X Factor keys Drama | Setting  
Water-based drama at this Austrian entry, with two main lakes and many smaller ones in play on half the holes. A regular host of the European Tour, the brave can prosper here with many risk-reward opportunities... or lose a lot of balls trying.

#### 73 HALMSTAD (NORTH)

**HALMSTAD, SWEDEN**  
X Factor keys Tournaments  
Solheim Cup host lets you walk in the footsteps of a star-studded US team as it winds between mature trees. You can smell the sea, but not see it...

#### 74 LINNA

**HARVIALA, FINLAND**  
X Factor keys Drama | Tournaments  
Close your eyes and think of Finland and you're at Linna. Golf on a grand scale, by Tim Lobb when he worked for EGD. There's drama to the holes on a course that's hosted the European Seniors Tour.

#### 75 CHIBERTA

**BIARRITZ, FRANCE**  
X Factor keys Drama | Setting  
Loveable old seaside-woodland hybrid that takes its drama to a new level when it emerges onto its Atlantic-side section.

#### 76 MELONARAS

**GRAN CANARIA, SPAIN**  
X Factor keys Drama | Setting | Tournament  
Yet another Gran Canaria course – the fact is, they are just spectacular as standard. This one lets you drink in the coastal views arguably better than most and has held the European Tour recently.

#### 77 ROYAL HAGUE

**THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS**  
X Factor keys Drama | Tournaments  
A top-five continental course with a seaside feel if not quite setting, because you don't see it other than glimpses. Dramatic holes over undulating terrain. It hosted the Tour, back in the day, as well as a Shell's Wonderful World of Golf match between Byron Nelson and Gerard de Wit.

#### 78 CHANTILLY (VINEUIL)

**PARIS, FRANCE**  
X Factor keys Drama | Tournaments  
Similar to above, Chantilly was a Tour stop, starting in 1913 and right up to when the European circuit had the best players in the world playing on it in the 1980s. Champions include Nick Faldo (twice) and Roberto de Vicenzo. An elegant parkland.

#### 79 KENNEMER (B&C)

**ZANDVOORT, NETHERLANDS**  
X Factor keys Drama | Tournaments  
Final one of a run of three classic courses that have a Tour-hosting pedigree. Kennemer's is more recent, with three events at this venerable club from 2013. Joost Luiten, Paul Casey and Thomas Pieters the winners.

#### 80 ST LEON-ROT

**HEIDELBERG, GERMANY**  
X Factor keys Tournament | Drama  
Cruises into the list as a result of its Solheim Cup-hosting pedigree from 2015, and also has some memorable holes.

#### 81 ROYAL OBIDOS

**OBIDOS, PORTUGAL**  
X Factor keys Drama | Setting | Tournaments  
A bit more Seve factor here – he designed it just before he died. As well as its location on the coast, close to Obidos, there's also the fact it has hosted the European Tour.

#### 82 THE SCANDINAVIAN (NEW & OLD)

**COPENHAGEN, DENMARK**  
X Factor keys Conditioning | Drama  
This is an entry for both courses here as they are impossible to split in pretty much any way. A remarkable achievement for a course located in Northern Europe to be in such superb nick.



The Scandinavian, Denmark

## 83 SOTOGRADE

🇪🇸 SOTOGRADE, SPAIN

**X Factor keys** Tournaments | Conditioning  
Combines some tournament-hosting pedigree with exceptional conditioning and the knowledge you're playing one of Europe's finest courses.

## 84 WINSTON LINKS

🇩🇪 VORBECK, GERMANY

**X Factor keys** Drama

Distinctive David Krause design with peaked, manufactured dunes lining the fairways. Host of Senior events and a course you won't ever forget.

## 85 LAS BRISAS

🇪🇸 MARBELLA, SPAIN

**X Factor keys** Drama | Tournaments

It's actually not so much 'tournaments' – although Las Brisas almost landed the 1997 Ryder Cup when it was mixing in those circles – but more the people who have played on this Trent Jones Snr original: Jack Nicklaus, Bing Crosby, Seve Ballesteros and even General Franco.

## 86 GREAT NORTHERN

🇩🇪 KERTEMINDE, DENMARK

**X Factor keys** Drama | Conditioning

New kid on the block in Denmark wows with its dramatic holes. A Jack Nicklaus design that leaves little in the tank.

## 87 NEGURI

🇪🇸 BILBAO, SPAIN

**X Factor keys** Drama | Setting

Views of Bilbao from this coastal classic by Javier Arana.

## 88 PALMARES

🇵🇹 PORTIMAO, PORTUGAL

**X Factor keys** Drama | Setting

Mixes expansive views from its high-sitting fairways and links-feeling holes on the 'Praia' (beach) loop.

## 89 PIRIN

🇧🇬 BANSKO, BULGARIA

**X Factor keys** Drama | Setting

Ian Woosnam and European Golf Design's

Gary Johnston laid out a fine course at the bottom of mountains that host the Bansko ski range.

## 90 TBILISI HILLS

🇬🇪 TBILISI, GEORGIA

**X Factor keys** Drama | Setting

Lassi Pekka Tilander routing over elevated fairways overlooking the Georgian capital, with lots of shots over ravines.

## 91 PGA NATIONAL (LINKS)

🇸🇪 MALMO, SWEDEN

**X Factor keys** Drama | Conditioning

A Kyle Phillips design in terrific nick and with plenty of fine holes over undulating, fast-running land.

## 92 KONGSVINGER

🇳🇴 KONGSVINGER, NORWAY

**X Factor keys** Drama | Setting

Sweeps majestically between tall pines, Kongsvinger is so good people travel from Sweden to play it.

## 93 AROEIRA (NO.1)

🇵🇹 LISBON, PORTUGAL

**X Factor keys** Drama | Setting

'The Wentworth of Portugal', and there are certainly echoes with the Surrey superstar and also Woburn's trio. Golf of a grand nature.

## 94 ESTONIAN

🇪🇪 TALLINN, ESTONIA

**X Factor keys** Setting

A former fixture in the main Top 100, it has plenty of strong holes but it's the one down to the sea you'll always remember.

## 95 GORKI

🇷🇺 ST PETERSBURG, RUSSIA

**X Factor keys** Drama | Setting

A subtle course, but has real highlights among its holes by virtue of the clever design touches. Delightful tranquil setting.

## 96 ZALA SPRINGS

🇭🇺 CSANYI LASZLO, HUNGARY

**X Factor keys** Drama | Conditioning

A resort that's quickly making its mark on

## IN NUMBERS

**63** The number of Continental Top 100 entries also in this ranking.

**2** The number of courses in the top 10 of the standard Continental Top 100 as well as this X Factor ranking.

**31** The combined positions in this ranking of our No.1 and 2 in the Continental Top 100.

**17** The top country: Portugal.

**9** The number of different countries represented in the top 10!

**24** The number of countries represented in the whole list.

the scene, with this Robert Trent Jones Jnr course from 2016 the star attraction.

## 97 PGA NATIONAL

🇨🇪 PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC

**X Factor keys** Conditioning

A fast-rising star of European golf, watch for this Kyle Phillips design to make a mark on our next continental Top 100.

## 98 GOLF VALLEY MUNCHEN

🇩🇪 MUNICH, GERMANY

**X Factor keys** Drama

A Ryder Cup course in waiting. Bold and brash, with drama around every corner, this Munich star isn't for the faint-hearted.

## 99 LIGHTHOUSE

🇧🇬 CAPE KALIAKRA, BULGARIA

**X Factor keys** Drama | Setting

This Ian Woosnam design isn't as explosive as neighbouring Thracian Cliffs, but it has some gorgeous infinity greens.

## 100 LA BAGNAIA

🇮🇹 SIENA, ITALY

**X Factor keys** Drama | Conditioning

Robert Trent Jones Jnr course in a gorgeous Tuscan setting. It is in superb nick and has plenty of memorable holes.

Winston Links, Germany

